

NO MORE VIETNAMS? : U.S. POLICY OPTIONS
AND PLANNING FOR INSURGENCY

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Brushfires on a Cold Dawn

For nearly forty years a succession of administrations, both Republican and Democrat, have expended a large slice of America's vast natural treasure on the maintenance and modernization of the nation's nuclear and conventional military forces. Developing in tandem with the growing potency of U.S. military might has been an enormous body of literature devoted to analyzing the strategic impact of both current and projected forces. Indeed, the fighting and re-fighting on paper of nuclear Armageddon and a conventional war on NATO's central front has assumed the status of a cottage industry for those who populate the ever-increasing number of think tanks and academic centers devoted to strategic studies.

While few question the merits of studying the impact of these forces and how they might best be deployed to preserve the nation's security, the fact remains that America's adversaries in the future will more likely be the subversive, terrorist, and guerrilla organizations which populate much of the Third World than the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces or the Group of Soviet Forces, Germany. Yet it is just this threat to U.S. security that has been most overlooked by post-war occupants of the Oval Office.

This paper will examine the nature of the insurgent threat, address options available to the United States for coping with it, and discuss steps to be taken to insure that, once committed to a program of assistance or intervention, U.S. policies are carried out to maximize the prospects for success.

While nuclear warfare between the Superpowers and a non-nuclear war between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in Europe represent the greatest threats to U.S. security, it is insurgency warfare which has become the prevalent form of conflict in the post-World War II era. The reasons for the "popularity" of low-intensity conflict (insurgency, terrorism, and subversion) are several. With the advent of nuclear weapons, war between the United States and the Soviet Union promises to exact costs from both far exceeding the benefits either could ever hope to gain. Indeed, the consequences of a nuclear exchange have so alarmed the Superpowers that, in spite of their numerous and deep divisions, they have gone to great lengths to avoid direct confrontation, not only on the nuclear level but in the conventional realm as well. Gains must now be made at low risk -- not through direct conflict, but by more subtle means; not in areas of vital interest, but on the periphery -- on the battlegrounds of the Third World.

Aside from the inherent risk of escalation, the Superpowers are well-advised to avoid conventional wars, if only for the tremendous costs involved. One need not be a systems analyst to observe the exponential growth in procurement costs between the weapons systems of the Second World War and those under development and in production today. Although NATO and the WTO states have not yet priced themselves out of the market for such arsenals, the same cannot be said of most Third World nations. The recent Arab-Israeli wars, the Falkland Islands War, and the Iran-Iraq War demonstrate the need for Third World countries to conclude their conflicts quickly, lest severe economic

dislocations caused by the rapid depletion of irreplaceable armaments, munitions, and trained personnel make any victory a Pyrrhic one. Indeed, it is problematic if even the United States, for all its wealth, could long endure the \$80 billion or so per year it expended at the height of the Vietnam War were it called upon to do so today.

Thus, almost by default, low-intensity conflict has become the low-cost, low-risk means of promoting international goals and objectives, not only for the Superpowers, but for the Third World nations as well. Arising from the dissolution of the great empires of Europe after World War II, Third World states proliferated dramatically. These young nations, many strategically located or possessing important natural resources, have provided fertile ground for Superpower competition. The Soviets have backed, in varying degrees, insurgent movements in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, China, Greece, Yemen, Central America and Southern Africa, to name but a few. The United States has also participated in insurgency by proxy: witness Afghanistan and Nicaragua. As will be seen, however, it is often the social and political unrest in these Third World states that creates the environment which the Superpowers exploit to their advantage, exacerbating the problems of Third World regimes more than creating them.

With the advent of the Cold War the United States increasingly viewed insurgencies as a new form of Communist aggression requiring an American willingness to intervene in the affairs of Third World nations to help them complete the task of nation building. Reaching its apogee under the Kennedy

Administration, this perception of America as guardian to and policeman of Third World states threatened by insurgency subsided rapidly with United States intervention in the Vietnam War. Indeed, by 1969 President Nixon proclaimed that in the future, Third World states threatened by insurgency would have to rely primarily, if not exclusively, upon friendly regional states for direct military assistance. The United States, said Nixon, would henceforth furnish military equipment and training; direct intervention, however, was out of the question. There would be no more Vietnams.

The resolution to avoid directly committing American power and prestige to support friendly Third World regimes threatened by insurgency proved difficult to keep in the face of an ever-changing international milieu. The fabric of the international order is as frayed today as at any time since the early post-war period. At the same time, the United States finds itself more dependent for its security upon the friendship of other nations than at any time since the darkest hours of World War II. The importance of many Third World states has jumped dramatically in the past twenty years. Those countries, many strategically situated or rich in natural resources, are all targets of Superpower attention in an increasingly resource-scarce world.

At the same time the United States and its allies have become dependent upon the stability of numerous regimes in the Third World, the political volatility of many of these states makes them ripe for the kind of political destabilization that, almost

overnight, toppled the governments of Iran and Nicaragua. Where will the next eruption occur? Saudi Arabia? Oman? The Phillipines? Is there anything the United States can do, or should do, to preserve these friendly governments in the event they are threatened by a virulent insurgent movement? If there is, how should the U.S. proceed? Devising a usable framework to answer the question of whether or not to commit U.S. forces and national treasure is not an easy task. It is particularly difficult given the realtive indifference in which the problem of insurgency and U.S. intervention is accorded in these days of nuclear warfighting scenarios and the AirLand battle doctrine for Europe. Therefore, before entering into any discussion of the United States' ability to cope with insurgency, it is necessary first to understand the basics of insurgency warfare.

Guerrillas: Why They're There; How to Beat Them

The basis for successful insurgent operations is found in the insurgents' ability to develop a popular cause around which they can rally the people against the government, and a governmental administration too weak and inefficient to suppress the revolutionary movement before it gets up a full head of steam and makes the transition from random acts of terror, sabotage and subversion (Phase I) to full-blown guerrilla operations (Phase II).¹

A popular cause can be any injustice, real or imagined, perpetrated on the people by the regime, such as the failure to enact a true land reform program in El Salvador; nationalism, as in Afghanistan, an arbitrary system of justice (again, El

Salvador), the failure to provide for political participation as in Nicaragua, or simply a failure to meet the rising expectations of the people. These problems are present in many Third World nations, most of whom are not the target of an insurgent movement -- yet. Espousing a popular cause is particularly important in the early phase of an insurrection when the revolutionaries must enlist the voluntary support of a large segment of the population before they can move to guerrilla operations. Gaining the peoples' voluntary support is often referred to as winning their "hearts."

However, to achieve the insurgents' ultimate objective, the overthrow of the existing order and their assumption of power, they must win the peoples' "minds;" i.e., convince the people that they offer a legitimate alternative to the existing regime which has at least some prospect of success; and that it is in the interest of the people to support them. This is best accomplished by having access to the people and exercising control over them. In fact, winning and maintaining access to the people is a prerequisite for any insurgent movement hoping to move beyond mere random acts of terror and subversion to openly challenge the government's legitimacy and sovereignty. This is as much a function of the regime's inefficiency and/or corruption within the state security forces as it is of the insurgents' organizational ability and cunning. For the insurgents, access to the population provides a source of manpower for guerrilla units, food and medicine to sustain them, and critical intelligence concerning the whereabouts of government troops and their plan of action.

It is important to realize that the insurgents need not have the willing or active support (the "hearts") of the people, as long as they have their passive support -- the product of threats and reprisals made effective only when the insurgents can move among the people to carry them out. Thus even though the people of a village may not support the guerrillas' cause, if the insurgents can exact retribution on those who support the government they will grow in strength. The guerrillas can impress into their ranks the sons and daughters of the elder villagers. And they will fight for the guerrillas, lest the insurgents return to the village and single out their family for punishment. Food and medicine coerced out of townspeople will sustain the insurgents just as well as provisions freely given by supporters of the cause. Fearing assassination, teachers, doctors, and government administrators will either refuse to serve in these communities or, if forced to do so, will quickly reach an accommodation with the guerrillas, if only to survive. Obviously, government sources of intelligence will quickly dry up.

It follows, then, that no matter how hard the government tries to win the "hearts" of the people through civic action programs and reforms, unless it can provide for their physical security and deny the insurgents access to them, the regime cannot extinguish the revolution. The primacy of population control is perhaps best reflected in the success Communist regimes (with their ruthlessly efficient security apparatus) have had in pre-empting popular efforts at organizing resistance against them. For both the government and the guerrillas, controlling the

population is the sine qua non for victory. If forced to choose between winning the peoples' hearts or controlling their minds, choose the latter every time. Once the guerrillas are denied access to the population they will, over time, wither away to small fragmented groups, incapable of threatening the regime. If the government is wise enough, and able to enact those reforms necessary to pre-empt the insurgents' cause and win the peoples' voluntary support as well, the liquidation of insurgent forces can be accelerated through a process of arming the people to defend themselves against guerrilla attack.

While the disease of insurgency may be easy to cure in theory, in practice it is frequently a difficult, frustrating process to find the right prescription. First, one must recognize that there would be no insurgent movement to begin with if the government had an effective security force to control the people and if the populous was not enduring some sort of injustice which the government could not easily remedy. Indeed, oftentimes the nation's political leaders will be trapped in a "Catch-22" dilemma when attempting to pre-empt the insurgents' cause. For example, in El Salvador popular dissatisfaction stems from the inequitable distribution of wealth and political power. The remedy appears clear: break up the great estates of the landed aristocracy and distribute the land to the people; furthermore, conduct open and fair elections where the people can choose their own leadership, rather than have one imposed by the National Guard. In order to effect these reforms, however, the political leadership in San Salvador must disown the very people who were responsible for

their assumption to power in the first place -- the military and the wealthy landowners. The enactment of these reforms, coupled with the elimination of corruption and incompetence through the cashiering of powerful military and political officials is asking a lot from the Salvadoran leadership, perhaps more than they can deliver. Of course, until the insurgency reaches the point where the government is obviously in danger, the temptation to ignore the problem of reform will always prove persuasive.

While both internal reforms and upgrading the nation's security forces are formidable challenges, there are instances where either or both were successfully accomplished. The British in Malaysia, Papagos in Greece, and Magsaysay in the Philippines all succeeded in wriggling free of their unique "Catch-22" dilemmas. Others -- Diem, Chiang Kai-Shek, Batista, and Somoza -- were either unwilling or unable to resolve theirs.

Forming guerrilla units is but one accomplishment of the insurgent leadership along the way to its ultimate goal of seizing power. The insurgents would prefer to take on the government's forces early and directly, but their initial weakness forces them to adopt a strategy mandating a protracted conflict in which their strength grows slowly as the government's gradually diminishes. Thus once the insurgents' political cells have established contact with the people and espoused a cause capable of attracting popular support, they can begin the process of recruiting for their guerrilla units and stockpiling the necessary supplies to support their operations against the government. As the guerrillas establish the ability to contest the government's legitimacy and

control over the population, the revolutionary forces become a formidable adversary. The government must greatly expand its security operations to control the population, while bearing the responsibility for maintaining the nation's communications, transportation, and economic infrastructure, a difficult proposition given that it often requires the sabotage of only one bridge or power plant to disrupt the life of an entire city or region. Thus at the very moment the regime finds its economy under seige and its resource base narrowed, it must expend enormous resources to maintain a force ten to twenty times that of the guerrillas if it is to exercise its sovereignty over the country.

The struggle between insurgent guerrilla forces and the government is often protracted in nature, lasting years or even decades. The reason for this is that, barring its outright collapse, the government maintains the upper hand in terms of men under arms, firepower, and resources. While government forces may not be adequate to crush the guerrillas, they are formidable enough to deter the insurgents from directly challenging the army in the set-piece battles that could bring about the regime's collapse. Only after a prolonged period of gradually amassing strength (with a few exceptions) can the insurgents proceed to Phase III insurgency operations -- open warfare designed to directly topple the regime. Even then, the availability of significant amounts of outside help has its greatest impact.

U.S. Options Against Insurgency

Every president since World War II has had to decide whether or not to provide U.S. military and economic assistance or

intervene directly in the case of friendly governments threatened by insurgency. At the dawn of the Cold War, aid was provided to the Greeks, the Phillipinos, and the French. As the empires of the Great Powers of Europe melted into the Third World, American assistance proliferated, peaking during the Kennedy-Johnson administrations. Yet even in the wake of the American public's disillusionment with the Vietnam War, President Ford actively contemplated dispatching aid to groups opposed to Cuban-backed marxist rebels in Angola. President Carter, whose election was, in large measure, a product of anti-interventionist sentiment, saw the need to airlift Belgian, French, and Moroccan paratroopers into Zaire to defeat an "insurgent" force launched from Angola. Although he adopted a hands-off policy when it came to supporting the Somoza regime against the Sandinistas, Carter also found it necessary to provide aid to the government of El Salvador in its struggle against an insurgency aided by revolutionary Nicaragua. The Reagan Administration has continued and expanded American assistance to friendly regimes threatened by marxist insurgencies, while supporting insurgents in Nicaragua and Afghanistan.

The United States is, and in all likelihood will continue to be faced with the problem of Third World insurgencies. But under what circumstances can the United States provide effective assistance or, in the worst case, conduct a successful intervention where American security interests are jeopardized by insurgent movements?

Amid the intellectual orgasms in Washington concerning the unbeatability of guerrillas and insurgent movements in the wake of

the Vietnam War, it is important to remember that not every American venture into insurgency warfare has ended in disaster. Greece and the Phillipines stand as examples of successful U.S. assistance programs. It is equally important to remember that the overthrow of autocratic regimes by self-proclaimed "freedom fighters" and "liberation" forces does not necessarily improve the human rights or material well-being of that nation's inhabitants, as the world has sadly witnessed in South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Iran, and Nicaragua.

The fact remains, however, that the United States no longer has the resources or the political will to play the role of World Policeman, righting every wrong that occurs (or appears to be occurring) to the detriment of its security interests. The United States must pick and choose with great care when and how to commit its power and prestige through intervention in Third World insurgencies.

There are a number of aphorisms bandied about concerning when and how the United States should intervene against insurgent forces in order to achieve the highest probability of success. Unfortunately, the "ought to's" involved are rarely useful in light of the political realities a president must deal with when faced with the decision of whether or not to intervene.

For instance, the reader can readily infer from the discussion above that the United States ought to intervene as early as possible against an insurgent movement, nipping it in the bud before its cancerous political cells metastasize and infect large portions of the affected nation with a guerrilla movement.

Yet it is in this instance that the United States is least likely to become involved. First, because the danger will not be as readily apparent, either to the U.S. or the target regime, as it will be in its later stages. Second, any regime whose legitimacy is being challenged will likely try and put off requesting large-scale assistance until the situation gets out of hand, lest they confirm the insurgents' claims that the government is really a puppet of the C.I.A. or U.S. "imperialist interests." Third, counterinsurgency (CI) operations against an insurgent movement in Phase I is primarily a police function. Any U.S. intervention at this point will likely be politically unpopular at home, particularly if the regime in question is autocratic in nature. One can easily imagine the outcry in Congress, the media, and the American public over the dispatch of American experts on methods of police control to a Latin American dictator hoping to crush the spark of popular opposition.

Given this, the best form of U.S. "intervention" in the early stages of insurgency will most often be economic assistance, particularly if the internal problem concerns unmet expectations for an improved standard of living. Hopefully, such a transfer of dollars will enable the government to buy time while it effects those reforms necessary to right the economy and dissolve popular dissatisfaction.

Much the same can be said of military assistance offered to the government's security forces. Properly employed, such equipment (particularly communications gear and assets for enhancing the mobility of government forces) can enhance the

regime's capability to break up insurgent attempts at terror and exert pressure on their political infrastructure as well.

The problem, of course, with assistance of this sort during Phase I is that the United States enjoys very little leverage over the host regime. The target country's leadership has little incentive at this stage to make basic reforms in the political, economic, or social structure of the nation while the insurgency appears to be nothing more than a low-level terrorist enterprise. This, of course, is exactly how the insurgents hope the authorities will react.

Another popular aphorism holds that the president ought to intervene only when the nation threatened represents a vital U.S. interest, or when its loss would directly imperil a vital interest. The problem here is that there is no consensus in the United States today on what Third World states are "vital" to U.S. security. Is Israel vital to U.S. interests on the grounds that it is a democracy? If so, what of Costa Rica? Must an American president maintain the autocratic rule of the Saudi monarchy? What of mineral-rich Zaire, strategically located Panama, Mexico, and the Phillipines? Where does one draw the line?

To Americans of different political stripes, the answer to the question of where U.S. vital interests lie varies widely. For this reason, a political consensus on the desirability of American assistance and/or intervention in Third World states threatened by insurgency often develops only after an insurgent movement is well under way, or is on the verge of victory. The key to maintaining a consensus among the American people for military

and economic assistance and, far more importantly, direct military intervention, revolve around:

- Justifying to the broad majority of the American people and the policymaking elite the need to maintain a friendly regime in a country that is vital to U.S. national security.

- Demonstrating that an insurgent victory would result in the installation of a government hostile to the United States.

- Justifying the costs, both human and monetary, involved in preserving the regime under attack.

These prerequisites are not easily met, but the burden of proof is far less onerous for the first two conditions so long as the costs are kept to a minimum. Simply stated, most Americans are willing to give the president the benefit of the doubt when he says that assistance to El Salvador or the Contras in Nicaragua is warranted in light of U.S. security needs. These assistance programs are relatively cheap and involve little in the way of a direct American military presence or the involvement of U.S. troops in military operations. Indeed, the nation strongly supported U.S. assistance to South Vietnam during the days when 16,000 American soldiers were involved in the advisory effort.

Should U.S. intervention become necessary, however, and combat forces be dispatched to, say, Central America to commence a large-scale Grenada-style operation, public scrutiny of the benefits to be derived from protecting a given regime will be magnified enormously. This makes sense when one realizes the far greater price the nation will be asked to pay for preserving what, on reflection, may not seem to be such a "vital" interest after

all. The U.S. public will want reassurances that its sons are not dying in vain and its tax dollars not misdirected from legitimate needs at home to support a losing proposition abroad.

If an administration has opted to proceed down the path of intervention, it must have both a strategy that is capable of resolving the issue in its favor and an awareness of the elements that make up a successful intervention. For the United States, the success or failure of any enterprise of this sort will be, first and foremost, a function of the target government's willingness and ability to undertake those reforms necessary to restore its legitimacy, pre-empt the insurgents' cause, and instill leadership, honesty, and competence into its security and administrative apparatus. This is no mean challenge, given that if the host regime had been acting in this manner previously, there would hardly have arisen a need for U.S. intervention.

Success or failure will also be a function of the United States' willingness to endure a protracted and bitter struggle, one without decisive battles and a victory that, at best, will be uncertain, confirmed only with the passage of time. Over this long haul, the administration's ability to minimize the funds it must ask of Congress and the number of troops it must deploy will contribute to the preservation of domestic support. If the war is capable of being fought without the use of draftees, so much the better. If allies can be found to help shoulder the burden, better still. Finally, the human and material resources offered by the nation must be used skillfully, and not squandered.

Additionally, the success or failure of an intervention will rest upon the leadership, the organizational ability, and the skill of the insurgent military and political leadership in the use of their resources. If the insurgents are well-organized and well-led, as in the case of the Viet Minh; if they can succeed in advancing a cause which places the regime in a "Catch-22" situation, then the obstacles to a successful intervention will be formidable. The availability of sanctuaries and outside (Soviet?) assistance will further complicate matters, but may also be used to good advantage if it can be shown that the guerrillas are the fabrication of outside forces and not the product of a disaffected population.

The objective of any U.S. intervention against an insurgent movement should be to prevent a regime hostile to the United States from assuming power by force. How this is accomplished depends upon the strategy chosen. The strategies to be discussed here are two: the Victory option and the Minimalist approach. Finally, the "non-strategy" of withdrawal is examined.

The Victory option mandates U.S. intervention with the objective of crushing the insurgent movement. Its greatest prospects for success occur when the regime in question is generally perceived as legitimate by the people, is democratic or quasi-democratic, and offers some form of redress of grievances for the population. A parallel might be made here with the Philippines under the leadership of Ramon Magsaysay. This strategic approach is further warranted if the approval or active support of friendly nations in the region is forthcoming, if

Soviet involvement is minimal, and if domestic support for intervention within the U.S. is both broad and deep. If all, or most of these conditions are present, pursuance of the Victory option may be warranted. The key elements here is the target regime's state of health and the popular mood within the United States.

Realistically, it must be recognized that the conditions conducive to adoption of the Victory strategy are unlikely to obtain and, if they did, the regime in question (as in the case of Magsaysay) would likely handle the insurgents on its own with a minimum of U.S. support.

Should the United States pursue the Victory option in the absence of these key conditions in an attempt to prop up an illegitimate or reactionary regime in the face of a popular insurgent movement, it is essentially committing itself to waging a colonial war. Under these circumstances, it would benefit U.S. CI operations if the entire target government were unified under the American ambassador. The United States ambassador and the U.S. military commander on the scene would then mandate the necessary political, economic, administrative, and military reforms, effectively running the country as necessary until the insurgency had subsided and a new political elite was prepared to assume control.

This approach may sound preposterous, given the imperialist connotations it implies, not to mention the cause of nationalism it automatically furnishes the insurgents and the public outcry certain to follow in many liberal circles in the United States.

Nevertheless, the U.S. successfully pursued this strategy in the Philippines in this century shortly after the Spanish-American War. More recently, the United States has (although under different circumstances) cashiered ineffective South Korean officers while they served under an American command in the Korean War. Experience in setting up free elections to replace "tainted" regimes was gained in Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, South Vietnam, and Grenada, with varying degrees of success. Nor should one underestimate the ferocity with which the American public is capable of responding when faced with a potentially calamitous situation abroad: witness the Oil Embargo of 1973-74 and the hostage crisis in Iran.

In opting to achieve the traditional military objective of victory over the insurgent forces in the absence of those local factors necessary to its accomplishment, the decisionmaker is left with little choice other than the conduct of a traditional colonial war, with all that it implies. If the American people perceive the stakes as high enough, and if the insurgents are of less than legendary proportions, then a Victory strategy may succeed. It would be the greatest folly, however, to adopt a Victory strategy without recognizing the high probability of having to wage a colonial war, as was demonstrated in Vietnam.

Given that the United States is likely to find more Thieus, D'Aubuissons, and Somozas than it is Magsaysays when the decision for intervention is made, the Victory option represents a high-risk, high-cost strategic approach; high cost because it implies that the United States is willing to assume the entire

burden, not only of defeating the insurgents, but of running the country as well, with all the attendant material costs and combat casualties; high risk because the enormous costs involved will sorely try the patience of the American public, eroding support for continued involvement in all but the most critical situations.

In the final analysis, then, what makes the victory strategy possible is not U.S. economic and military might, although this is important, but the durability of American support at home, the enlightenment and flexibility of the threatened regime abroad, and the quality of their insurgent adversaries. The key element is, however, is the regime under attack. The United States can assist it in making the changes necessary to defeat the insurgents, but it cannot, short of fighting a colonial war against odds only a Mississippi riverboat gambler would love, win the war by its efforts alone.

Nor does the United States need to crush the insurgents, at least not in the sense of destroying their field forces and expelling them from the country. Although it has often been said that, to win, the insurgents simply have to avoid losing, it is less well recognized, particularly in U.S. military circles that victory is not essential for the achievement of its policy objectives. Indeed, as long as the United States does not lose, it wins. This brings us to a discussion of the Minimalist strategy.

An advocate of the Minimalist approach would contend that only the government of the state threatened by insurgency can take those steps needed to defeat the insurgents. Thus it is folly to believe that a U.S. Victory strategy can succeed in and of itself.

On a higher plane, the Minimalist would argue that the Victory option, involving as it does the presumption of a colonial war effort, would reduce the United States to the moral level of the Soviet Union, whose violation of Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary prompted an international outcry against the Kremlin that lingers even today. The American people, the Minimalist would warn us, will not permit their government to wage a colonial war for long; thus all the insurgents would have to do is wait the U.S. out, as the Communists did in Vietnam.²

As a clincher, the Minimalist would raise the issue of how other friendly Third World regimes would react to a de facto U.S. assumption of power in a country for the purpose of suppressing an uprising. How certain could they be that a U.S. presence, ostensibly for their protection, would not also represent the potential force to effect their liquidation? It is a fear that Third World nations, most only a generation out of the bondage of colonialism, feel acutely. One need only recount the unease of many Arab states over the creation of the Rapid Deployment Force and their strongly negative reaction to the U.S. request for basing facilities to get a sense of how they would react to an imperialist America in the Soviet mold.

The Minimalist strategy recognizes that insurgents attempting to overthrow an existing regime, even a corrupt and inefficient one, still face formidable obstacles along the path to power. This is particularly true when the level of outside assistance is balanced on both sides. After all, insurgency warfare is considered a form of protracted conflict. Given this conflict

environment, it is far easier for the United States to keep a government from losing the war than it is to actively attempt to crush the insurgent movement by itself. Should the government effect the reforms necessary to reverse the situation, the need for direct American intervention in the conflict will be minimized, serving primarily to offset any large-scale infusion of outside support for the insurgents. A Minimalist approach (as surfaced during the Vietnam War under the guise of the enclave and demographic frontier strategies) is far more manageable in terms of the burden it places on U.S. resources.³ At the same time, it does not involve the strong decreasing returns to scale that occur through the adoption of a strategy for all-out victory which, in every respect, is the responsibility of the government under attack. Ideally, a Minimalist strategy would see the commitment of only those U.S. combat forces which are needed to prevent the insurgents from conducting successful Phase III operations. The numbers of these forces should be held to an absolute minimum, and the units promptly withdrawn after an emergency Phase III campaign is completed. Other U.S. forces committed as advisory units in Phase II should have population security as their primary mission. Should U.S. combat forces be assigned to a country not involved in combatting Phase III insurgent operations, they should also concentrate on area security. Given the proper leadership and training, "conventional" forces can function effectively in a population security role. The Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program run by the U.S. Marines in Vietnam is but one example. If outside assistance is crucial to the success of insurgent

operations (rarely the case in Phases I or II), the instigation of unconventional warfare activities in local supplier states, as is occurring today in Nicaragua, may prove worth the diversion of resources away from population security.

Save in the event of an imminent collapse of the regime in question, U.S. ground forces should never bear the major burden of combat in CI operations.

In sum, then, the Minimalist approach seeks to buy time for the target government to put its house in order, or for a capable and acceptable political alternative to emerge.

The effectiveness of any U.S. intervention in a Third World insurgency war will thus be measured in terms of:

- How effectively time was bought for the government to establish its legitimacy and rebuild its strength to cope with the insurgents without U.S. combat assistance. The measure of effectiveness will be how cheaply time was bought in terms of American casualties and materiel. This is a necessary condition given the nature of protracted warfare, which often requires an extended commitment. Keeping costs low helps maintain popular support at home for a continued American military presence after the immediate crisis has passed, as in Korea but, unfortunately, not in Vietnam.

- How effectively U.S. forces contributed to the defeat of the insurgent forces. To the extent that American military operations weaken the insurgents, they increase the relative strength of the government, thereby accelerating the process of the regime's recovery and U.S. withdrawal from a combat role.

There is implicit in this criterion a trade-off between American casualties and progress against the insurgent movement. Here we find another shortcoming of the Victory option. By focusing on the military defeat of the insurgents field forces, it trades casualties, but gains little. If American forces suffer losses, they should be associated with attempts to assist the government reassert its control over the population, the surest way of bringing the insurgent forces to battle -- on U.S. terms. Again the lesson of Vietnam is clear. There U.S. forces expended resources at a prodigious rate as part of a Victory strategy against communist insurgents. In so doing the U.S. military achieved neither a quick victory, nor the maintenance of support at home for a continued U.S. presence in Vietnam after the bulk of American ground forces were withdrawn.⁴

The adoption of either a Victory or Minimalist strategy presupposes that the president has effectively made the case for it to the Congress and the American people. If such a justification is not forthcoming, then the administration must seriously consider foregoing the military option in favor of a policy of withdrawal. Withdrawal, in its own way, is often just as risky a proposition as the Victory option. Abandoning a known quantity, no matter how undesirable a regime may be, for an unknown element has its risks as Castro, the Sandinistas, and Khomeini, among others, have clearly demonstrated. Furthermore, while the president may view the policy option as one of withdrawal, the leaders of other states in the region friendly to the United States may see it as a policy of abandonment, as did

the Persian Gulf monarchs in the wake of the Shah's demise and Latin American strongmen after the fall of Somoza.

Of course, should the consequences of an insurgent victory (which seemed of small moment at the time the decision for withdrawal was made) turn out to be worse than anticipated, the president will have to weather the angry storm of protest from Congress, the media, and the American public. Little wonder, then, that four successive U.S. administrations pursued the Minimalist strategy in Vietnam before President Johnson adopted a Victory strategy in the summer of 1965 as the price of committing U.S. forces to battle.⁵

Thus the withdrawal policy has a certain "damned if you do, damned if you don't" quality about it. It is not surprising that revolutionaries such as Daniel Ortega, Fidel Castro, or the Ayatollah Khomeini failed to embrace the United States merely because, after years of support for their enemies, it now read the handwriting on the wall and recognized the inevitable transfer of power. Abandoning old friends for new often brings nothing more in return than the enmity of both.

Despite these shortcomings, the policy of withdrawal has qualities which recommend it under certain circumstances. If the president cannot justify an intervention to Congress or the people; if the United States has made a good-faith effort through its military and economic assistance programs to provide the regime with an opportunity to right itself; and if, in spite of this, the rot in the political structure of the government under attack has passed beyond the point of redemption, then withdrawal

is the only option, albeit the least unpleasant of a trio of very unpleasant options. What is likely to be in shortest supply under the circumstances is the political courage and savvy necessary to decide in favor of withdrawal before the United States becomes inextricably committed to defeating the insurgents, and while there is still time to build bridges to the insurgent leadership.

A number of presidents have chosen, in one form or another, a policy of withdrawal over intervention, to include the cases of China, Indochina, Laos, Cambodia, Angola, and Nicaragua. Not all these decisions ended in disasters for the United States; nor is it by any means clear that intervention in these insurgency wars would have resulted in the preservation of American interests any better than the withdrawal or noncommitment of U.S. troops and supplies did. In the end, it again comes back to the regime under insurgent attack. What are its prospects? How stable is it? What leadership is the current or potential governing elite capable of exercising? What sacrifices are those in power willing to make in order to preserve their political system as opposed to that of the insurgents? The answers to these questions will determine whether intervention has a chance of success. This reality is perhaps best reflected in the words of Dean Acheson who, in responding to a question over the issue of "Who Lost China" during the McCarthy era, is said to have replied: "I didn't know it was ours to lose."

Planning for Counterinsurgency

Although the discussion here will focus on what steps the U.S. should take if it is serious about maintaining a capability for intervention in Third World insurgencies, the author would be

remiss in not pointing out the enormous potential of preventive medicine to help these nations resolve, or at least learn to live with, current problems that may well serve as the breeding grounds for future insurgencies.

For instance, in the case of Mexico the United States is literally face-to-face with a nation where widespread corruption is an accepted part of government. There government has engaged in the progressive restriction of free-market forces in the economy while accumulating a massive international debt in the midst of one of the great oil finds in history. Mexico is also faced with a population explosion that threatens to undercut any economic progress that escapes the clutches of the chosen few. To the extent the United States is willing and able to provide material assistance and technical expertise (say, in the fields of birth control and energy), it may well be getting off cheaply in the long run. The aphorism, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," certainly applies in the case of budding Third World insurgencies. Nevertheless, there are limits to how much the United States can accomplish in its role of "good doctor" to developing nations. As in the case of intervention, little will come of U.S. assistance if the regime in question is riddled with so much corruption that the aid merely becomes another way for unscrupulous officials to line their pockets, or if the economic system is so restrictive that it frustrates the very purpose of an aid package. Again, the battle will be won only by the close cooperation of both the U.S. and its Third World counterparts.

In planning for U.S. assistance or intervention, the assumption here is that the Minimalist approach will be followed in the event a policy of withdrawal is not adopted. That is to say, the presumption that any president would choose to commit the United States to wage a colonial war, or another Vietnam, has been ruled out. This represents an unqualified blessing in the short run, given the current inability of the U.S. national security structure to execute even the less demanding Minimalist strategy.

What is required in the way of creating a U.S. capability for counterinsurgency? First and foremost, enduring emphasis on the counterinsurgency contingency must come from the president himself. The many parts of the bureaucracy involved in gearing up for this new set of requirements must believe that what they are being asked to do is important, and that the penalties for those who fail to comply will be high. Only the president can bring this kind of pressure to bear on the bureaucracy. In some cases, as with President John Kennedy and the counterinsurgency "fad" in the early 1960's, even this may not be enough.

Any president, no matter how committed he is to expanding U.S. options to deal with insurgency, has only a small slice of time available to focus on it. Thus the need to institutionalize planning and coordination for CI contingencies within the national security structure is obvious. A permanent interdepartmental group within the NSC apparatus with a State Department representative serving as chairman, and with members from the NSC Staff, DOD, the JCS, CIA, USIA, Treasury, and USAID should be formed to coordinate CI plans and programs in Washington and with the ambassador in the

field. The group should be responsible for executing and following up on the directives of the national security council pertaining to U.S. security assistance programs or intervention, should the latter become necessary. The members of the group should be experts on the subject of insurgency warfare. The president should avoid populating the group with high level dilettantes in the field of insurgency, as occurred with Kennedy's Special Group, Counterinsurgency.⁶

At the Country Team level, the ambassador must remain in control of all U.S. assistance/intervention activities, to include those of the armed forces. This is mandated by the unique political and social dimensions of insurgency warfare. One need only recall the primacy accorded DOD in Vietnam to observe the drawbacks of fragmenting unity of effort and allowing military considerations to prevail. Indeed, it is essential that all CI activities of the regime under attack be similarly centralized, ideally under a civilian with insurgency experience.

The meat on this skeletal organizational structure for counterinsurgency will come primarily from a commitment of manpower and resources on the part of the departments and agencies involved. To this end, the State Department would do well to upgrade the status of its political-military bureau to take full advantage of its role as director of the interdepartmental group and the Country Team. Failure to do so may open the way for DOD's International Security Affairs (ISA) branch, sometimes referred to as "the Pentagon's State Department," to fill the vacuum as occurred during the Vietnam War. Ambassadors to Third World hot

spots must be chosen for their expertise of the country, the region, the problems of developing nations, and the nature of insurgency, and not on the basis of political connections or campaign contributions.

For the CIA, adoption of a Minimalist approach contingency will require greater emphasis on human intelligence (HUMINT) operations, the most important dimension of CI operations. Of equal importance will be the Agency's ability to oversee forces of native irregulars. An example of this is the early Civil Irregular Defense Groups in the Buon Enao population security program, practiced with Special Forces' assistance in South Vietnam during the early 1960's. These paramilitary forces, if organized properly, can take an enormous strain off the government's security forces while making things rough for the guerillas.⁷ Active paramilitary forces also reduce the need for American ground forces. Whether the CIA can rebuild its counterinsurgency and HUMINT capabilities, given that organization's shift away from them in recent years, remains to be seen. Furthermore, it is by no means certain that the close working relationship that existed between the Special Forces and the CIA can be duplicated to the degree it was in Vietnam, where it incurred the disapproval of the Army leadership.

The biggest challenge in reviving a U.S. CI intervention capability, however, rests within the Department of Defense. The armed services, where strong feelings of political betrayal and military failure over the Vietnam War still run deep, are not anxious to become involved in another war run by systems analysts

and deterrence theorists, nor are they willing to divert scarce resources (manpower in particular) to prepare for CI contingencies.

This is particularly true in the case of the Army, which bears the primary responsibility for CI operations. The Army has rebounded nicely from the Vietnam Syndrome which pervaded the country in the 1970's, leading to the decimation of its Special Forces units. Under the Reagan Administration, the Army has rejuvenated its force structure for low-intensity warfare. The creation of the 1st Special Operations Command (SOCOM) was to have been the signal that the Army was once again back in the business of dealing with insurgencies, along with terrorism and unconventional warfare. By the late 1980's, the 1st SOCOM is slated to comprise five Special Forces Groups and a Ranger regiment made up of three Ranger battalions. Additionally, the Army is redesignating the 7th Infantry Division as a light infantry division, with a second light division on the drawing boards.

While imposing on paper, these forces do not yet possess the doctrine, training, or command structure necessary to execute efficiently a counterinsurgency contingency. The Rangers are trained for commando-style operations (raids, rescue operations, rapid insertion/extraction missions, etc); the Special Forces are still primarily oriented, as they have been since their creation, on unconventional warfare (i.e.; acting as guerrillas, not as part of a population security program).⁸ The light infantry divisions have already been assigned possible roles on NATO's central front,

the Persian Gulf, and Korea, as well as Third World insurgency contingencies.⁹ Thus none of these special operations forces are primarily focused on a counterinsurgency environment.

On top of this, the Army leadership has adopted a "No More Vietnams" posture of its own, similar in some respects to the "No More Koreas" Club formed in the wake of the military's unpleasant experience with limited war in the 1950's. Specifically, the Army wants guarantees from the president that prior to any future U.S. intervention in a Third World insurgency, American popular support for the war will be maintained. Furthermore, the Army leadership wants assurances that the Victory option will be exercised, and that the JCS will be allowed to engage, if necessary, the source of the problem (e.g., Nicaragua or Cuba, in the case of El Salvador).¹⁰

Whether these appeals for guarantees represent yet another Pentagon "wish list" or a subtle means of forcing the administration to opt for the withdrawal option rather than boxing the Army into another "no win" war, there is little doubt the armed services have a long way to go before an effective U.S. counterinsurgency capability can be realized. It remains to be seen whether the military, and the Army in particular, have the capacity to learn from the failure of the Victory strategy in Vietnam. It also remains to be seen whether the nation's civilian leadership is able, first, to prod the services to develop this unwanted capability; and second, to provide the additional resources (particularly manpower) required to support the

reintroduction of counterinsurgency into the military's full menu of contingencies.

The prospects are not good. Resources (manpower in particular) are in short supply. Europe and the Gulf are, if we are to believe the reports emanating from the Pentagon, barely defensible, with Korea already written off in the event of a major war. Add this to the services' Vietnam trauma and the comfortable framework they have developed for viewing war in conventional terms, and the challenge becomes even more imposing.

Furthermore, even if a president and his senior defense officials made counterinsurgency a top priority, the chief executive's time is sorely limited and the time his defense aides spend on the job is measured better in months than years. Under these conditions it becomes relatively easy for the services to resist any mandate, even one from the president himself, simply by sinking it into the bog of bureaucratic inertia.¹¹

A generation ago, President Kennedy recognized the Army's opposition to taking on the counterinsurgency mission and went to great lengths to overcome it. For instance, in the late autumn of 1961 Kennedy held an extraordinary session with the Army's major commanders in the Oval Office. There Kennedy personally requested the generals' voluntary and enthusiastic support, not merely their pro forma acceptance of his directives, for the development of an Army counterinsurgency capability.¹² The brass gave only lip service to this bit of personal lobbying on the president's part and, several months later, Kennedy had to get tough. He began issuing specific instructions to the Army through Secretary of

Defense McNamara. Action was taken -- reluctantly. However, those changes that did occur were, for the most part, quietly scrapped after the president's death.¹³

To give the generals their due it must be recognized that they were being asked to prepare for a two-and-a-half war strategy with a one-and-a-half war Army. While the Army could play the game of slotting its forces to multiple contingencies, hoping that no more than one or, perhaps, two would ever occur simultaneously, the practice proved wholly inadequate for Third World insurgency contingencies, where light -- not heavy -- forces trained in low-intensity warfare, not conventional operations, were required. The Army's organizational inertia, coupled with the Kennedy Administration's failure to examine closely the trade-offs in manpower and materiel required for the development of this kind of capability, led to MACV's attempts to fight a quasi-conventional war as part of a Victory strategy in Vietnam.

Thus the generation of a CI capability within DOD rests on two imposing criteria: first, the imposition of a high-level political override on the Army of sufficient intensity and duration to bring about change; second, provision of the necessary resources and incentives to make the service's development of these forces less onerous. Given the low priority accorded CI forces in the current administration, its lack of expertise in insurgency warfare, and the voracious demands for resources present in the current defense program, it is unlikely that the United States will possess in this decade the kinds of military forces necessary for intervention called for in the Minimalist

approach. In the event intervention is required, it will almost certainly be executed without an adequate doctrine for either Joint or Army operations, with ad hoc command relationships -- both in the field and in Washington -- and within an ineffective strategic framework. Therefore, should the U.S. fail to stem the insurgent tide through a program of military and economic assistance, a policy of withdrawal may be the only realistic option open to American security planners.

Aside from the changes required in U.S. military forces, emphasis must be placed on the close coordination of the agencies represented on the interdepartmental group with their counterparts in the country threatened by insurgency and other regional actors and/or potential allies. Coordination should be effected through the respective American embassy in each country. De facto unity of command of local and allied forces under the U.S. ambassador and the American field commander, mandatory in the colonial war envisioned in the Victory strategy, is also highly desirable under the Minimalist approach.

If U.S. forces are relatively few in number compared to those of the government under attack, however, such an arrangement may not be realistic; at least not under American auspices. The decision will then have to be made of whether or not to place American troops under the command of local military leaders. Nothing should be done, however, to prejudice the establishment of a native counterinsurgency headquarters for the integration and direction of the political, economic, military, and social dimensions of the conflict. The objective here is always to insure

that resources are being allocated in the most effective manner possible and that proper priorities are maintained.

Providing for unity of command is no easy matter; indeed, the U.S. services by themselves often appear incapable of effecting such a relationship. Nevertheless, the penalties of forgoing it in an insurgency war are just as severe as in any other form of war, and perhaps greater. One need only examine the tangled command structure that existed in Vietnam to get a feel for the deleterious effects fragmentation of command imposes upon CI operations. The issue is so important that its absence alone should provide strong grounds for eschewing the option of military intervention.

Popular and congressional support should be cultivated to the maximum extent possible. This involves as much candor as possible, within the limits of security, between the administration, and the Congress and American people. Credibility gaps, so harmful to the Johnson and Nixon administrations during Vietnam, must be avoided. Guidelines for censorship of the media should be established beforehand and explanations provided for their need. Restrictions on travel to nations considered directly hostile to the United States' war effort should be made known immediately upon intervention, lest certain well-intentioned but ill-informed citizens fall prey to the propaganda ploys of America's adversaries.

The importance of congressional participation in the national security decisionmaking process cannot be overemphasized. Eisenhower in the Indochina crisis of 1954 and Kennedy in the

Laotian crisis of 1962 both benefitted by including key congressional leaders in the debate over intervention. Ironically, Lyndon Johnson, who participated in the Indochina deliberations in 1954 as Senate Majority Leader, as president either ignored the congressional leadership or made it feel "used," as occurred with the Tonkin Gulf resolution. Left out of the discussions which led to the key decisions on intervention in Vietnam, congressional leaders were later less reluctant than they might otherwise have been to criticize "Johnson's War." For a president to ignore the wishes of the Congress, he must assume the full burden of responsibility if the intervention cannot be brought to a quick and successful conclusion, as in Grenada. Quick victories, however, are unlikely prospects in wars of insurgency, and the patience of Congress and the American people is likely to wear thin.

Conclusions

Little attention has been given by U.S. political and military leaders to the potential threat posed to American national security interests from Third World insurgent movements. Planning for counterinsurgency contingencies over the past four decades is more reflective of a hope that insurgent movements will somehow resolve themselves in America's favor, or just fade away. No policy structure is in place to deal with insurgencies that fail to fit this preferred mold, nor is action being taken to remedy the problem. While U.S. military and economic programs may be of some help to regimes threatened by guerrilla movements, they are not likely to be decisive in and of themselves. The problem

arises if the government in question fails to cope with insurgency and a crisis forces the United States' hand in an area of vital interest. Current policy arrangements offer the president only a choice between a policy of withdrawal or a costly intervention using the malstructured military forces and ad hoc institutional arrangements that proved so inadequate in Vietnam. If there are to be "no more Vietnams," then the United States national security apparatus must learn from the mistakes of that unfortunate experience and face up to the challenge that revolutionary wars, or insurgencies, will not fade away. They require every bit as much attention as the other forms of military and political conflict which dominate the policymaking process today. Failure to give this most prevalent form of conflict its due will incur a cost which will be exacted in America's national treasure and in the blood of her citizens.

NOTES

1. For a well-written analysis of insurgency warfare and the doctrine of counterinsurgency, see David Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1964); Franklin M. Osanka, ed. Modern Guerrilla Warfare (Glencoe, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1962); John McCuen, The Art of Counterrevolutionary Warfare (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1966); and Douglas S. Blaufarb, The Counterinsurgency Era (New York: The Free Press, 1977). Similar analyses with a focus on the Vietnam insurgency can be found in Robert G.K. Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966); and No Exit From Vietnam (New York: David McKay Co., 1969); and General Vo-Nguyen Giap, People's War, People's Army (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962). See also Robert B. Asprey, War in the Shadows (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Inc., 1975) for an excellent historical overview of insurgency warfare.

2. See Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., "Public Opinion and the Vietnam War," (Unpublished paper, Harvard University, May 1979); and John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973).

3. A comparative analysis of these strategies can be found in Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., "The Army Concept and Vietnam: A Case Study in Organizational Failure" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1984), pp.708-22.

4. For a discussion of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in Vietnam, see *Ibid.*, pp.475-83, 535-79.

5. See Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1981).

6. Blaufarb, The Counterinsurgency Era, p.86; for a more detailed discussion, see Krepinevich, "The Army and Vietnam," pp.133-41.

7. Colonel Francis J. Kelly, U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1971 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army (DA), 1973), pp.20-43; and Krepinevich, "The Army and Vietnam," pp.230-44.

8. Department of the Army (DA), Low Intensity Conflict, FM 100-20 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, January 1981); DA, Command and Support of Special Forces Operations, FM31-22 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 23 December 1981). For an overview of current Special Forces operations, see Colonel Robert J. Baratto, "Special Forces in the 1980s: A Strategic Reorientation," Military Review 63 (March 1983); and Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., "The Army and Counterinsurgency Operations: Plus Ca Change . . ." (Paper delivered at the annual International Studies Association conference, Atlanta, Georgia, March 1984).

